Dichmont

C. W. Peterson Pioneered Alberta Farm Development

By Eric D. McGreer, Calgary Herald, Feb. 19, 1944.

Mr. Peterson's sudden death early this month brought to a close a remarkable career which had its beginning in Western Canada more than half a centry ago. The record of that career is worthy of a place in the history of the pioneers who laid the foundation and shaped the destiny of Canada's vast prairie domain.

From his native city of Copenhagen, Denmark, Mr. Peterson, 19 years of age, arrived in Winnipeg in 1887. Four years later he came to Calgary to take a junior post under the late William Pearce, who was in charge of the local office of the Dominion department of lands and mines and at that time chiefly engaged irrigation work. Great schemes were underway to provide for the influx of settlers which was to follow on the turn of the century. The population of the entire province of Alberta was less than 70,000.

The districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Athabasca and Alberta were formed in 1882 and Regina established as the seat of government of the Northwest Territories. But it was not until 1897 that the Executive Council of the Territories decided to organize a department of agriculture.

C. W. Peterson was asked to undertake the task and the following year he went to Regina and was made deputy commissioner of agriculture. His comprehensive first annual report for the year 1898 bears testimony to the energetic, capable administrator he proved to be. S mere listing of some of the subjects dealt with, gives one a glimpse of the capacity of the man: Crop and finance statistics, agriculture experiments, irrigation, meteorological observations,

importation of purebred stock, brand recording and administration, stock and hide inspection, agriculture societies, prairie fires, game protection, departmental library and lastly territorial hospitals, for at that time the department of agriculture supervised health services in the Northwest Territories, with a staff of five.

The following year territorial livestock associations were formed at all main centers of the west with Mr. Peterson acting as secretary-treasurer for most of them. The cattle and horse breeders of the Calgary district were organized at meetings in August and September, 1859, and the first public sales of cattle started as a result.

Two years later the indefatigable deputy explained to the initial meeting of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association, the method of organizing livestock associations and thus sowed the seeds of the organized grain growers movement which was to grow apace in the years to follow.

Jessie Knight was encouraged in his pioneer work in beet sugar production, and steps were taken to encourage wool production, when the Territorial Sheep Breeders' Association was organized in 1902 with Mr. Peterson as managing director.

Trasportation and markets, the "grain blocade" and industries allied to agriculture all came within the scope of the department's problems.

Little wonder that on Mr. Peterson's resignation on June 30, 1903, his successor was able to state:

"It is safe to say that Mr. Peterson's name will be permanently

identified with the history of agricultural progress in the Territories. I feel sure that his keen intellect, wide knowledge and untiring energy, abundantly manifested in connection with the work of the department since its inception, will enable him as the executive officer of the important organizations with which he is now connected, to render valuable service to the Territories."

A hundred stories could be told of incidents in Mr. Peterson's career of this period. Space forbids -- but one foverning principle must be recorded. Here are his words, "The most useful work the department can hope to undertake is to help agricultural classes to help themselves -- not by means of profuse expenditure of public funds, but rather through cooperative effort between the department and the farmer and the rancher."

The only change he would have made in this principle is to have broadened its scope to national and international policies.

The "important organizations" mentioned by his successor at Regina, in the quotation above, were, the Calgary Board of Trade and the Interwestern-Pacific Exhibition,' the forerunner of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. He served as secretary and as manager of these organizations for three years. From 1906 to 1911 he was general manager of the Immigration and Colonization departments of the C. P. R., the latter part of this period serving the same company as Superintendent of Irrigation.

Land development and colonization were undertaken on a huge scale. Settlers came in ever increasing numbers and Mr. Peterson played no small part in the organized immigration and settlement work of that period.

Like most men of affairs of the time he bought large acreages, and formed land companies for direct operation and leasing to tenants. Many prospered by such ventures -- for a time. Partly because of ill health and partly because the economic future of land holdings seemed secure, Mr. Peterson retired to Victoria in 1913. But shortly after the outbreak of the war he went to Ottawa as secretary of the "National Service Board" and later became the Deputy Fuel Controller for Canada.

In 1920 he returned to Calgary, and since that date devoted most of his time to his agricultural journal, "The Farm and Ranch Journal" which he founded in 1905 with the late M. D. Geddes, then associate editor of the "Farmers' Advocate", and E. L. Richardson, a life-long friend.

Throughout his life Mr. Peterson devoted himself to writing. He did not have much scholastic training, but through his own efforts acquired, largely by reading, a deep learning which was reflected in his literary work. United with this self-acquired scholarship was a remarkable personality. His mind was not chained to logic. He possessed peculiar natural gifts which have his writing a vigorous refreshing style and a brilliance which won wide recognition. The foundation of his literary style was aptly summed up in a quotation which he chose for the masthead of his journal -- "Style is mainly the personality of the writer and a clear thinker always has a good style."

Essentially Mr. Peterson was an essayist and many of his editorials for which he was famous were actually brilliant essays.

His first published article appeared in the "Canadian Magazine" in

December, 1899. From that time on he wrote constantly, his subjects almost exclusively dealing with the agricultural economic life of Western Canada. His library on this and allied subjects was beyond doubt the most comprehensive in Western Canada. He strove unceasingly to have agriculture, as an industry and a way of life, assigned to its rightful place in the economic life of the world.

He claimed, with other economists, that for a century it had been a "sweated industry" and that this was the underlying cause of the world's economic distress. Mr. Peterson pleaded his case with untiring zeal for almost 60 years.

Not only were his literary gifts devoted to this task, but indeed his whole career, including his service on a score of government commissions. Success crowned many of his efforts, but in the main it was not until the last month of his life that he could feel there was hope for a sane world viewpoint on the place of agriculture in the economic life of the future.

This hope was inspired by an address of Lord De La Warr at Calgary before the Canadian Club a month ago. Mr. Peterson was an honored guest at the head table. As the eminent British authority outlined his views on post-war agricultural policy, thought after thought gave expression to policies which had been pesistently advocated by Mr. Peterson for years. The climax was the reading of a letter by Lord De La Warr from Manchester manufacturers in which they pledged support to the rehabilitation of agriculture as an essential corollary to world prosperity.

No tribute, to a great pioneer who served his adopted country well, could have been more appropriate.